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## UNH Professor: Harry Potter Will Not Die

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DURHAM, N.H. -- Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry may have prepared Harry Potter to duke it out with Lord Voldemort, but the real test of his survival will be the battle over who actually "owns" Harry – author J.K. Rowling or her fans. According to a British Victorian literature expert, Rowling's threat to kill at least two main characters in her final book is her way of taking control and is not unlike actions taken by other authors whose books have become extremely popular with readers.

In the end, however, Harry will survive, says James Krasner, professor of English and British Victorian literature at the University of New Hampshire. "There's no way Harry will die," he says. "Harry won't die largely because these are comic stories, like Dickens' novels, in which good has to win."

"Whenever an author's books become very popular in his or her lifetime, as is the case with Rowling, a tug of war starts between the author and the fans about who the characters really belong to. Rowling, like Conan Doyle (creator of Sherlock Holmes), is trying to assert her control. She's reminding us that Harry is her character, not ours; she can kill him if she wants to. Doyle actually did kill off Sherlock Holmes, but Rowling won't go that far because she cares about Harry. Conan Doyle was really sick of Holmes," Krasner says.

And it's not the first time Rowling, who is adept at promoting her books, has threatened to kill off a major character. According to Krasner, Rowling caused a media sensation when she said a "major character" would die in Harry Potter and the *Order of the Phoenix*. Rumors targeted Harry's best friend, Ron Weasley, but in the end, it was Sirius Black, who Krasner says "was an important supporting character, but not really a major character like Ron."

"Harry won't die because Rowling's too good of a storyteller to completely undercut her genre. She's an extraordinarily careful plotter, not unlike Dickens, and she has worked very hard to make all the books emotionally satisfying. Having Harry die would be a miserable plotting failure," Krasner says.

Rowling employs the genre of British Private Boy School novels, a popular writing style of 19th century Britain but one that may be unfamiliar to most Americans. The classic novel of this genre is *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, set in the Rugby School for Boys. "The stock characters in these stories are very similar to those in Harry Potter. There's the serious, good-hearted hero from a modest background, the obnoxious aristocratic kid who lords it over everyone, and the nebishy friend to the hero. The stories tend to focus on rugby games (Quidditch games in Harry Potter) and pranks that take place in the dorms after the lights go out," Krasner says.

"Rowling's books are very well written, and we're lucky to be around to see them created. Her

particular talent is plotting and comic characterization. She's a lot like Dickens in that she does such a good job with comedy, and with predictable plotlines, that she can move into tragedy, and complexity, rather than starting with a tragic mode," Krasner says.

So if Harry Potter doesn't die in the final book, who does?

According to Krasner, "Lord Voldemort has to die. And Snape, who is really fighting for good despite all appearances, will likely die. Neville Longbottom is really the chosen one, so I suspect he'll die," he says.

And readers shouldn't be surprised if the much-loved Professor Dumbledore, who died in the last book, returns. "Obi-Wan Kenobi, Gandalf-type paternal wise man mentor characters always die. This is a multi-genre convention, turning up in war stories, medieval romances, fantasy, adventure, cop movies, martial arts films. They come back as ghosts," Krasner says.

**EDITORS AND REPORTERS: Rowling comes to New York's Radio City Music Hall Aug. 1 and 2, 2006, for her first book reading in America since 2000. Krasner is available for interviews until July 26. He can be reached at 781-237-7401 (home) or [jkrasner@cisunix.unh.edu](mailto:jkrasner@cisunix.unh.edu).**